

Deterioration : A Question of Time

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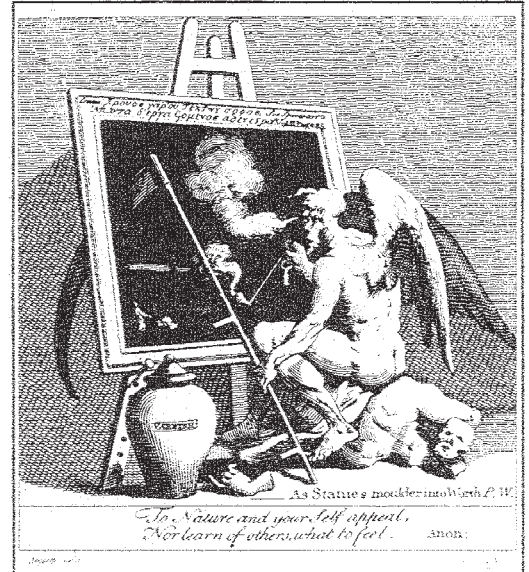
Time is a mysterious chimera where his script is Land and People. Where Art, the interaction, gets sympathies from creators' descendants.

In Zurich, where one finds the biggest clock in the world, it has been proven that the vibration of each second deflagrates matter's micro-structures. The same effect is well observed in Black Forest by the summation of the multitude of tiny Cuckoo Clocks. Even though Time's behaviour is not well grasped, irreversible Time's effects on artwork and world heritage are irrefutably well documented^{1,2}: Erosion, Corrosion and Disillusion.

"Le temps, devant qui rien ne dure,
Ni fer ni chose tant soit dure..." (Le Lorris)

In the 17th, the action of Time is illustrated by the engraving of William Hogarth: "Time Smoking a Picture" where Time is represented as the Evil Master of the Deterioration seated upon a mutilated statue, and smoking a painting which he has driven his scythe. Time plays a subtle game which changes from case to case. Speaking of cases, a transportation case is strongly damaged by a powerful shock of a micro second impact or Time can be less aggressive when embody in another forms such as RH. For example, in the summertime, fish are jump-in' (evidence of moisture) and the cotton is high. We know that cotton is hydroharmonic, but not as much as wool but is it enough to maintain a safe Resolute Humidity?

Remember that any visible damage made by Time could potentially affect the sensibility of the visitors or, at the extreme, affects the reputation of the museum itself. In matter to neutralize museum visitors' cumulative damage on an artwork through *Negative Time Perception* (NTP) during exhibitions, a standard light level of a maximum of 50 Lux is recommended. At this intensity most of NTP is undetectable. Since subjectivity is inversely proportional to the light intensity, severely damaged



"Time Smoking a Picture" by Hogarth.

artwork could be shown in the dark. Realize that all museum standards are subjects to change every scientists' generation.

Ward³ evokes an interesting aspect of the 4th dimension in his book entitled "The Nature of Conservation; A Race Against Time". According to the title and many observations on histologic monuments, Time runs crazy. For a conservator the preservation of the integrity of an artwork means running faster than Time. This is the way to avoid Time reaching the finish line first and causing damage. This concept is called Preventive Conservation. Would a conservator as fast as Ben Johnson be fast enough to prevent deterioration? What happens if the conservator who wins is declared positive on drug test? Is it against the Code of Ethics? Fortunately, as proved by Einstein's theory, Times goes by slowly when you are not having fun.

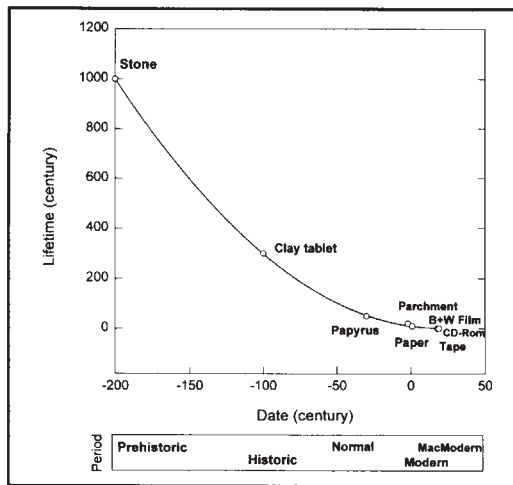


Figure 1

The more menial and boring the preventive conservation work (such as housekeeping and box-making), the better are ones chances of winning against Time.

Figure 1 called *Figure 1* shows a curious choice of the society about the information medium through different periods of human development and its sensitivity to the influence of Time. Newer information media have a shorter and shorter lifetimes. The *Tempo* acts as a logarithmic voracity on media support as well as on integral museum collections and their activities and, consequently, on the derivative collectivity. In the present period, Time is very aggressive with data. The only compensation we have is the great increase in the data capacity in a smaller and smaller modern information media. By extrapolation of the curve, the next commercialized data medium should appear at the turn of the 20th Century (just before the moon leaves the Earth) with a capacity a million times bigger than a CD from Rome with a lifetime of less than 10 years in something smaller than 1 cm².

A mysterious aspect of artwork ageing is that the older the object, the more valuable it is. This is due mainly to the rarity and some subtle phenomena such as patina on bronze sculpture. Artefacts get more fashionable despite Time's wound on them. The Cracked Liberty Bell still remains a solid American

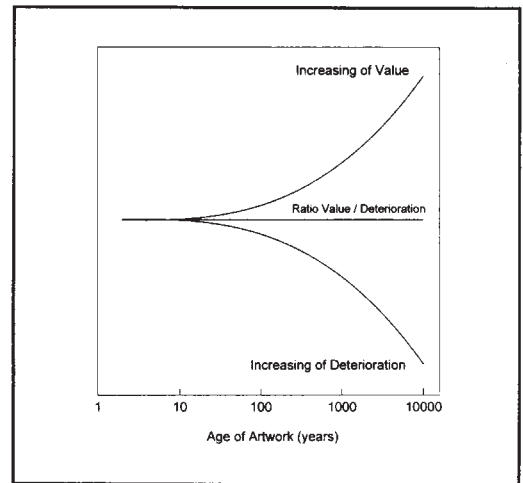


Figure 2

symbol. The Sphinx looks enigmatically marvellous without his nose and the sensuality of the armless Venus De Milo is powerful. This theory is demonstrated in Figure 2 by the typical ageing pattern of Artwork based on human appreciation and deterioration. The ratio shows a clear neutralization of these two tendencies. A freshly painted work of Picasso will have the same ratio Value/Deterioration 100 centuries later even though the beginning of the fossilization process.

"O douleur!, ô douleur!, Le temps mange ma vie..."
(Baudelaire)

Curiously, Time's impact is different on human beings. We do not seem to age fashionably correctly. The rarity of older people is nonetheless scientifically proven. Still, human appreciation and Time's effects provide the same sort of decay in people. Wrinkles around the smile of the Mona Lisa get more interest from curators and the general public than wrinkles on Catherine Deneuve. Time diverts our attention from our final, untimely destination.

The extrapolation of the state of the human body and organic artwork is clear. In the end, "unto dust they shall return". However the dust from Artwork will have more value than the fresh ashes from humans regardless of the ¹²C organization or the amount of ¹⁴C. A Few exceptions exist, for example, when



Figure 3 *Venus De Milo, Louvre.*

human remains are declared world heritage such as those of the Iceman found at the Austrian-Italian border in 1993, or the Bog Man shown at the British Museum. This new classification provides a new glorious standing for the human body. There are intermediate, indefinite cases: How do we explain the value of Lenin's formalin-pickled body during the pre and post Gorbachev era?

Methodologies drawn more and more to reach a nice individual dead body standard in the future are: 1 Avoid trivial burials in mass graves (this way you will avoid being treated as a common corpse). 2 Get lost and die in the middle of nowhere, such as in peat bog (try to be original) and be sure that no one finds you until a few centuries have gone by. 3 Die with as many of your tools and jewellery around you as possible (rich archaeological sites attract media and mediatisation generates fame. 4 Do not forget your name tag (important for your cataloguing). Heritage Canada encourages people to get an encoded bar tattoo from the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) as soon as possible.

The question remains: what is the most important thing to preserve through the Time? Civilisation, World Heritage or the Invisible? In this century the international community tends to preserve the material more. Nations are allowed to fight each other if the war's impact is minimal on their heritage. People could be replaced but not a culture. Paradoxically, an old town occupied by its native habitants becomes, with Time, a historic site. If the people disappear, the town becomes a tourist site.

References:

1 Russell, John, "Art Preservation: A Race Against the Ravage of Time", *New York Times*, Sunday, 5 may 1985, p.1-18.

2 Michalski, Stefan, "Time's Effects on Painting", *Proceedings of Shared Responsibility; A Seminar For Curators and Conservators*, National Gallery of Canada, 26-28 October 1989, p39-53.

3 Ward, Philip, "The Nature of Conservation; A Race Against Time", *The Getty Conservation Institute*, Marina del Rey, California, 1986, 69 pages.

About the author:



Jean Trèstôt has recently published his "Essay on Tempoethic". Ten poetic texts enshrined in a time capsule and buried in Times Square in New York. The opening of the capsule is due in the year 2995. Since the document was treated with parylene, the laminated ashes should remain readable.